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January 24, 2022

Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, Provides 1.5 Billionth Tablet of Praziquantel for Treatment of Schistosomiasis

- **Joint commitment with World Health Organization to eliminate the neglected tropical disease (NTD) schistosomiasis**
- **Tablet donations provided for the treatment of more than 600 million schoolchildren in affected countries in sub-Saharan Africa since 2007**
- **Expanded commitment to Rwanda enables treatment of adults, supporting the country's national NTD strategic plan**

Darmstadt, Germany, January 24, 2022 – Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, a leading science and technology company, has donated the 1.5 billionth tablet of praziquantel in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO). This medication is the standard of care for the treatment of schistosomiasis – one of the most common and devastating parasitic diseases in tropical countries. Children in poor and rural communities are most severely affected. Since 2007, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, has enabled more than 600 million schoolchildren to be treated in 47 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere.

“The donation of the 1.5 billionth praziquantel tablet marks an important milestone in our joint effort to eliminate schistosomiasis. To date, hundreds of millions of children, who otherwise would have been left untreated, have been able to receive treatment for this devastating disease,” said Peter Guenter, Member of the Executive Board of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, and CEO Healthcare. “As clear proof of the significant impact of our donation program, a study published in



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the Lancet Infectious Diseases journal shows that the prevalence of schistosomiasis among school-aged children in sub-Saharan Africa has been reduced by almost 60% over the past 20 years.¹ I am very proud of our company's contribution to the fight against schistosomiasis and we will remain fully committed to continue our efforts until the disease is eliminated once and for all."

The Schistosomiasis Elimination Program of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is an important part of the company's goal to improve quality of life, healthy living and well-being for an increasing number of people in the world. The 1.5 billionth tablet was part of a delivery of almost 24 million tablets to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Since 2013, the central African country has received more than 138 million tablets.

Simultaneously with the delivery of praziquantel to the DRC, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is also expanding its commitment to Rwanda. In January 2021, the company had announced that it would provide an additional 8 million tablets annually to the country. The tablets are needed to treat adults affected by schistosomiasis and will complement the annual donation of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, for the treatment of school-aged children. The first delivery arrived in the country at the end of 2021. First rounds of drug administration for adults have taken place in the meantime, marking the official kick-off of the partnership. The treatment is a key part of Rwanda's strategic plan in the fight against neglected tropical diseases. It aims to eliminate schistosomiasis and other NTDs as a public health problem by 2024.

Through its Schistosomiasis Elimination Program, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is addressing the key requirement of treatment with praziquantel as an integral part of the WHO's 2021-2030 Roadmap for NTDs. Moreover, the company is contributing to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, especially Good Health and Well-Being (Goal 3) and Partnerships (Goal 17), in line with its [sustainability strategy](#).

References

1. Kokaliaris C, et al. *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, 2022:22(1)-136:149

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About Schistosomiasis

Schistosomiasis is a chronic condition and one of the most common and most devastating parasitic diseases in tropical countries. It is estimated that more than 240 million people are infected worldwide and that around 200,000 die from it each year. Flatworms transmit the disease. It is widespread in tropical and subtropical regions where large sections of the populations have no access to clean water and sanitary installations. People become infected with the parasite via contact with freshwater, for example while working, swimming, fishing or washing their clothes. The minuscule larvae penetrate human skin, enter the blood vessels and attack internal organs. The infection rate is particularly high among school-aged children. Praziquantel is the only active ingredient with which all forms of schistosomiasis can be treated. WHO has therefore deemed praziquantel, the most cost-efficient solution for the health of patients in need, as the drug of choice.

About the Schistosomiasis Elimination Program

Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, initiated its Schistosomiasis Elimination Program in cooperation with WHO back in 2007. Since then, more than 1.5 billion tablets have been donated, enabling the treatment of more than 600 million school-aged children. Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, has committed itself to maintaining its efforts in the fight against the tropical disease until schistosomiasis has been eliminated. To this end, each year Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is donating up to 250 million tablets to WHO. The planned annual donation has a value of US\$ 32.5 million. In addition, the company is supporting awareness programs at schools in Africa in order to educate children about the causes of schistosomiasis and ways to prevent it. Furthermore, as part of a public-private partnership, the company is researching a new medication of praziquantel that can also be administered to very young children. To date, the tablets are only suitable for children older than six. More information about the Schistosomiasis Elimination Program of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is available at www.makingschistory.com.

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About Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany

Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, a leading science and technology company, operates across healthcare, life science and electronics. Around 58,000 employees work to make a positive difference to millions of people's lives every day by creating more joyful and sustainable ways to live. From advancing gene editing technologies and discovering unique ways to treat the most challenging diseases to enabling the intelligence of devices – the company is everywhere. In 2020, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, generated sales of € 17.5 billion in 66 countries.

The company holds the global rights to the name and trademark "Merck" internationally. The only exceptions are the United States and Canada, where the business sectors of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany operate as EMD Serono in healthcare, MilliporeSigma in life science, and EMD Electronics. Since its founding in 1668, scientific exploration and responsible entrepreneurship have been key to the company's technological and scientific advances. To this day, the founding family remains the majority owner of the publicly listed company.